

Deerfield, IL - Four federal law enforcement organizations joined U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) to brief 10th District police chiefs, mayors, sheriffs, county board members, high school superintendents and school principals on suburban drug-gangs, their links to international cartels and new federal funding to help suburban communities fight the growing threat.

Congressman Kirk hosted today's anti-gang briefing that featured presentations from Mark Prosperri (Chief of the U.S. Attorney's Narcotics & Gang Section), Richard Sanders (DEA Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Field Division), Andrew Traver (ATF Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Field Division), Mitchell Marrone (FBI Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Field Office), Terry Lemming (Illinois State Police), Mark Rasmussen (Lake County Metropolitan Enforcement Group) and Mark Rodriguez (Former Latin Disciples gang member who now works with law enforcement).

"There are over 800,000 gang members in America, equal in number to the world's fourth largest army," said Kirk leading the gathering of five dozen suburban officials. "Drug gangs with strong links to international cartels are moving from Chicago to the suburbs. Last week, the House of Representatives approved \$100 million in new funding next year to help communities fight this new threat."

Palatine police reported new gang activity while Lake County MEG estimates there are over 3,000 gang members operating north of Lake-Cook road. Waukegan police report the average age of a gang drive-by shooter today is now just 13-years-old.

That is not all. On a January congressional mission, Kirk learned Afghanistan's heroin crop more than doubled last year. Chicago is one of the only cities in America where heroin from every growing region of the world is sold. Seizures of Afghan heroin are up 50% in the U.S. with increasing reports that drug profits finance terrorist groups like Al Qaeda. "Most suburban kids used to avoid heroin use because it involved needles," said Kirk, "but the new Afghan heroin is so pure, it can be snorted like cocaine. By avoiding needles, heroin dealers now reach suburban teens to get them hooked."

Roosevelt University conducted a study last year showing heroin use in suburban Cook county doubled over the last decade and quadrupled in the collar counties. Chicago police reported

that thirty to forty percent of the people arrested in a heroin sting operation last year were from the suburbs, many of them teenagers. As drug gangs backed by international cartels infiltrate communities outside Chicago, suburban police departments need federal support to combat the new threat.

Last year, the Congress funded the creation of the FBI's National Gang Intelligence Center, backed by 24 new ATF agents, 25 additional U.S. Attorneys and \$25 million in new grants for local law enforcement. The House recently approved funding next year for an additional 20 Safe Street Task Forces, 32 more U.S. Attorneys and a new \$60 million local law enforcement grant program to directly support local police fighting gangs. "I want our suburban police departments to be at the front of the line when the new program is funded," said Kirk, a member of the House Appropriations Justice subcommittee that first approved these programs.

The House approved nearly \$100 million in new anti-gang funding. The Attorney General also directed U.S. Attorneys to prepare new anti-gang strategies for their jurisdictions to make use of the new funding.

Federal officials at the highest level accelerated anti-gang programs following media reports that MS-13 gang members met with an Al Qaeda operative in Honduras and that Al Qaeda funded an MS-13 summit. These reports did not prove credible but did highlight the vulnerability of the United States to organizations that could freely move gang members and drugs into the U.S.

With several thousand gang members already in the suburbs, former Latin Disciples members like Mark Rodriguez highlighted the appeal of joining a drug gang: "Gang members use flashy cars and clothes, women and money to entice vulnerable teenagers to join their gang." Mark Rodriguez joined the Latin Disciples when he was 15 after his best friend promised the gang would protect him. Rodriguez sold cocaine for four years until his best friend was murdered by an opposing gang member. He credits a police officer for helping him leave the gang.

Congressman Kirk is paying special attention to supporting Waukegan's police department with a separate \$100,000 grant to bolster Waukegan Police's NET team and its work against the 10 gangs operating in the northern suburbs. Under the leadership of First Lady Laura Bush, the Congress will also approve funding for faith-based programs to keep kids from gangs. Congressman Kirk recently arranged for a \$200,000 grant to Waukegan's Jesus Name Apostolic Church to start a "Family First Center" targeted to help at-risk youth.

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